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SUBJECT: EXPERIENCED CAREER DIPLOMAT CHOSEN AS NEW ROMANIAN
FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: Pol Counselor Ted Tanoue for 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Just three days after the abrupt resignation of Foreign Minister Adrian Cioroianu, veteran career diplomat Lazar Comanescu was sworn in as the new Foreign Minister at an April 14 ceremony attended by President Basescu and PM Tariceanu. Comanescu is an experienced professional diplomat of the older generation with extensive background on both EU and NATO issues. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The 59 year old Comanescu has served in the Romanian Foreign Service since 1972, with an interruption in service from 1982 to 1990. He built a good reputation for himself during the processes of negotiating Romania's membership to both NATO and the EU, as Romania's Representative to both NATO and EU headquarters between 1998 and 2001, and then to the EU only until 2007. After EU entry in January 2007, Comanescu continued to serve in Brussels as Romania's Permanent Representative to the EU. His experience in European affairs dates to the early nineties (1990-1994), when Comanescu held a junior position at Romania's mission to the EU.

¶3. (SBU) Comanescu played a senior management role at the Foreign Ministry in the mid-nineties (1995-1998), when he was appointed deputy FM after briefly serving as Director of the MFA's EU Directorate and as a senior advisor to then-Foreign Minister (and current Defense Minister) Teodor Melescanu. During the communist period, Comanescu served in the MFA between 1972-1982 in the International Economic Organizations Directorate. During a break in service from the Foreign Ministry, he was an assistant professor at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies from 1982 until 1990. Comanescu graduated from the Academy of Economic Studies in 1972, attended courses in French civilization in Paris in 1972, and holds a PhD in international economic relations received in ¶1982. He co-authored books on the world economy and international economic transactions both before and after ¶1989. Comanescu is married and has one daughter.

¶4. (C) Like many Romanian senior diplomats from the Ceausescu era, Comanescu has been accused of having links to the Securitate. After his nomination, Comanescu defended himself saying that he had done "nothing reproachable in the past," and underscored that when he left the Foreign Ministry, he encountered difficulties in finding a job in academia, which he claimed would not have happened to anybody tied to the security services. Comanescu was also implicated in a controversial real estate deal during his tenure as Romania's Ambassador to the EU. In 2002, he authorized the spending of 7 million Euros for a new office for Romania's mission to the EU. According to a media investigation, the market value of the building was roughly half the price that was paid. There was no official investigation into the case, but the media wrote at length on this controversy at the time and the local

press has replayed the story after news of Comanescu's nomination broke on April 14.

15. (C) Comment. The swift agreement between the two palaces on naming the new FM contrasted sharply with the usual pattern of public disagreements between the PM and the President over candidates for ministerial positions. President Basescu strongly opposed outgoing FM Adrian Cioroianu's nomination last April, but eventually had to comply with Parliament's decision to approve a reshuffled government which included the ill-starred Cioroianu. Comanescu's nomination does follow a more recent pattern of ministerial nominations (including the agriculture and justice portfolios) in which the President and PM settled on technocrats and highly-qualified professionals with no strong party affiliations. Observers have suggested that Tariceanu may have wanted to propose a more political figure for the foreign affairs portfolio. But given Tariceanu's desire not to engage in a possibly damaging public battle with Basescu on the eve of local elections, and--perhaps more pertinent--because the Liberal party had simply run out of qualified and confirmable candidates, the better part of valor appears to have been Comanescu. The new Minister's tenure is not likely to go much beyond this fall's parliamentary elections. A senior advisor to the PM commented to us that Comanescu was "a good outcome, for an interim period," and that he would be "well-oriented" across the spectrum of foreign policy issues. Basescu was as usual direct and to the point in his public comments to the new Minister: there would be no changes in Romania's foreign policy priorities, he emphasized. End Comment.
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